

TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Student Vet Inspired by Study Trip

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Education: Bathurst woman spends a month as a volunteer in the Pacific's Cook Islands

A Bathurst veterinarian student got everything she bargained for during a volunteering stint last May



Ashley Babin was in the Cook Islands between Hawaii and Tahiti as a volunteer through The Esther Honey Foundation. The 24-year-old student at the Atlantic Veterinary College in Charlottetown, P.E.I. spent a month looking after animals and learning about the local culture.

"As a veterinary student, I can honestly say that my four week stay at the Esther Honey Clinic on the lovely island of Rarotonga, was one of the most educational and inspiring experiences that I've had," said Babin. "Not only did I gain some hands-on practice in my field of study, but I also experienced the Rarotongan culture to its fullest as I was immersed in it day after day.

"The people were so friendly and generous and treated us Honeys' very well. My time spent in Rarotonga will definitely be a cherished and looked back on with fond memories."

The Esther Honey Foundation was founded by a woman who visited the Cook Islands in the South Pacific Ocean in 1993. The animal lover came to learn that there were no veterinarian clinics available in that region. When she returned to her home in the United States, she gathered resources and started the non-profit organization that exists today.

The foundation now provides veterinary clinics and resources for the Cook Islands and surrounding area. All the vets who go there are volunteers.

"I was fortunate enough to volunteer at the clinic at the same time as five amazing veterinarians; one from Belgium, one from the Netherlands, one from Australia, one from the U.S.A. and one from the U.K.," said Babin. "They were all so eager to teach, which was paramount to me as a student.

"I was taught how to do so many things that I had simply learned in theory as well as review important concepts that I'd never had a chance to use in real life, as I had only just completed my second year of my DVM," she said.

"This included placing IV catheters, giving injections, placing endotracheal tubes, prescribing the correct medicine at the correct dose while ensuring no drug interactions and, lucky for me, even a couple dog castrations."

Babin was accompanied in the Cook Islands by two of her classmates from the Atlantic Veterinary College. She said there were many volunteers on hand during her stay so she was able to participate in a study on the local dog population.

"Due to the high number of volunteers that were at the clinic at the same time as me, it gave the foundation an opportunity to continue the very valuable census of the dogs on the island," Babin said.

"Although this meant that we'd have less days getting our hands dirty in surgery or on consults, it also meant that we got to see the island and its people in a totally different manner than we would have if we had simply been vacationing and visiting the tourist spots."

Babin said she was also intrigued by the issue of fish poisoning in the area.

"It was also very interesting to see fish poisoning cases as I had never really heard of it until then," she said.

Babin said the combination of her work, the local scenery, and volunteers made her trip worthwhile. She added that the local residents were very accommodating.

"The island people were always so friendly and constantly offering us fruit or drinks on those hot days," she said. "It was an amazing experience and enabled us to determine the percentage of desexed dogs on the island as well as give owners advice on their pets."

"The census brought in a lot of animals that would otherwise not have been seen. The benefits of it were immense."

Babin said that she would recommend The Esther Honey Foundation volunteering program to any vet student.

"All I can say is that I'm very glad that Cathy Sue (Honey) took that fateful trip in 1993 as it has not only enabled me to improve my skills and to have the experience of a lifetime, but it has helped countless numbers of animals."

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